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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000663

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO AF NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFTHANISTAN: NEXT STEPS AFTER  
PARLIAMENTARY RESOLUTION AGAINST STAYING IN URUZGAN

REF: THE HAGUE 595

Classified By: Ambassador Fay Hartog Levin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶11. (S) SUMMARY:** A large majority of the Dutch Parliament recently sent a clear message to the Cabinet they are opposed to a follow-on mission in Uruzgan. The Cabinet continues to deliberate on the nature of its post-2010 involvement in Afghanistan. It will be difficult, but not impossible, for the Cabinet to decide in favor of a Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) follow-on mission in Uruzgan. Coordinated engagement by the international community, including the U.S., will support the most robust Dutch contribution. END SUMMARY.

PARLIAMENTARY SALVO, CABINET CONTINUES DELIBERATION

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**¶12. (U)** On October 6 Parliament adopted a joint Labor Party (PvdA)/Christian Unie (CU) resolution stating that, as the Cabinet considers a way forward in Afghanistan, it should be mindful that Parliament wants all troops out of Uruzgan by the end of 2010 (reftel). The resolution was passed with over two-thirds of the MPs voting in favor. Only three parties opposed the resolution, the Christian Democrats (CDA), the Political Reformed Party (SGP), and the Democrat 66 Party (D66). While this vote does not bind the Cabinet to do anything other than continue its deliberations, it does send a very clear message that there is little support for an extended mission in Uruzgan. Prime Minister Balkenende (CDA) said "we will bear this resolution in mind, but I will not run ahead of what the Cabinet may decide." Defense Minister van Middelkoop (CU) stressed the Cabinet had its own responsibilities and did not rule out that the Cabinet might yet propose another mission in Uruzgan.

**¶13. (U)** A second resolution also passed calling for the Cabinet to decide about a post-2010 mission in Afghanistan by March 1, 2010. Balkenende stated he understands the reason behind the resolution but also refused to be pinned down to a deadline. Embassy The Hague continues to expect the decision process to follow the timing outlined in previous reporting - that the Cabinet will attempt to finalize their decision no later than January and a Parliamentary vote should be expected no later than the middle of February.

CONSTRAINTS ON CABINET DECISION

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**¶14. (S)** Prior to the parliamentary debate and resolutions, we understand the Cabinet was moving towards agreeing to some sort of continued mission in Uruzgan. State Secretary

Timmermans (PvdA) told the Ambassador on October 1 the Secretary's repeated public appreciation for Dutch partnership in Afghanistan and its development efforts in Uruzgan had been particularly effective in moving the Cabinet forward. "We were almost there." Now, after the resolutions, the senior bureaucracy that had supported continued engagement in Uruzgan is disheartened, and no one knows what the Cabinet will do.

**¶15. (C)** The face-off between Parliament and the Cabinet reflects the widening divide among the three coalition parties as they vie for support in the local elections next March. Public opinion on Afghanistan involvement emboldens the opponents of a follow-on mission: the Maurice de Hond poll the week of the vote showed 58% favored withdrawing all troops from Afghanistan while only 23% favored staying in Afghanistan with fewer troops and only 3% favored sending in more troops. Contributing to this skepticism are widespread, ongoing concerns about corruption, especially in the Afghan elections, and doubts about the effectiveness of Dutch development efforts.

**¶16. (C)** The Labor Party has suffered the most erosion of support among the electorate. According to the most recent de Hond poll, Labor would drop from its current 33 seats in Parliament to 14, going from being the second most popular party to the sixth. The party leadership believes this drop is because the party has not been clear what it stands for. One area where Labor plans to be clear is in stopping a new mission in Uruzgan.

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**¶17. (S)** The Dutch will not make a decision on a follow-on mission in Afghanistan before U.S. and NATO policy decisions are made and coordinated with allies. The Cabinet will be influenced by, among other considerations, how other Allies respond - whether they will contribute more military personnel and resources. Maarten Haverkamp, the CDA Foreign Affairs Committee spokesperson, told POLMIL officer that an ISAF announcement soon on the future lead of Task Force Uruzgan would also be very positive for their political argument in favor of a Dutch Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) remaining in Uruzgan. He echoed the Cabinet's long stated position to comply with the letter of the 2008 mandate of no longer being the lead nation in Uruzgan post-2010. An early selection of a post-2010 lead of Task Force Uruzgan will allow the Dutch debate to focus on coordinating their civilian Uruzgan PRT with a trusted security partner.

#### CONTINUING ALLIED ENGAGEMENT

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**¶18. (S)** A long-standing relationship with the British, Australian, Danish, and Canadian embassies in The Hague has resulted in close communication on Afghanistan issues, including cooperation on messages and key leader engagement. This has resulted in a coordinated allied front without inundating key decision-makers. For example, the Australian Ambassador met recently with selected women MPs specifically on Afghanistan. The British Special Representative for Afghanistan adjusted his visits to The Hague to more effectively capitalize on allied partner strategies.

#### NEXT STEPS

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**¶19. (S)** Embassy The Hague has identified Deputy Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Labor Party leader Bos and Development Cooperation Minister Koenders as the two key Labor Party decision makers on Afghanistan.

**¶110. (S) PROPOSED CALL BY SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN:** Post recommends SRAP Ambassador Holbrooke speak with Minister Koenders by telephone during

the first two weeks in November. The objective is to show continued interest in Dutch views on Afghanistan and specifically Minister Koenders' assessment of the "new NATO strategy" in Afghanistan and his expectation of Dutch participation.

¶11. (S) MEETINGS FOR EMBASSY THE HAGUE: After the President has decided the level of American engagement with the McChrystal strategic plan, the Ambassador will meet with Bos to praise Dutch involvement and encourage continued participation in the NATO mission. The Ambassador will also gauge the Labor Party's flexibility on engagement in Uruzgan. Additionally, she will meet with the political floor leaders from Parliament to carry the same message.

¶12. (S) PROPOSED VISIT BY DEPUTY SECRETARY LEW: A late November visit by Deputy Secretary Lew to The Hague (as part of other travel) could influence Dutch decision-making. Development aid remains a Dutch priority -- for example, the Dutch contribute \$750 million annually for food security and are world's the sixth largest aid donor. The Deputy could engage on these issues in a very public way -- bolstering Dutch leadership -- while more quietly pressing for contributions to Afghan security in meetings with key Qcontributions to Afghan security in meetings with key decision-makers such as Development Minister Koenders.

¶13. (S) VISIT BY AFGHAN STAKEHOLDERS: Post is initiating coordination with SCA and U.S. Embassy Kabul for outreach efforts by Afghan stakeholders. A visit by provincial leaders from Uruzgan in mid-December has the potential to impact the decision process at a critical juncture.

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